



Providing Vital Cancer Screening Programs to Women Who Face Special Barriers to Accessing Health Services

Public Health Problem

In 2002, an estimated 400 women were diagnosed with breast cancer, and approximately 100 women died of breast cancer in Vermont. About 40 women in Vermont were diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2002.

Evidence That Prevention Works

Early detection cancer screening services need to be available and accessible to all women. Studies show that early detection of breast and cervical cancer and a comprehensive follow-up program save lives. Timely mammography screening could prevent 15% to 30% of all deaths from breast cancer among women over the age of 40. Having a Pap test as recommended could prevent nearly all deaths from cervical cancer.

Program Example

A CDC-supported program, Ladies First, is Vermont's Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening Program. This program makes special efforts to reach out to women with special needs (e.g., women who are blind, hearing impaired, in wheelchairs) who face special barriers to accessing health care services. Ladies First has been a big help for Natalie, who is blind. The program helped her fill out the necessary forms to get screened for breast and cervical cancer, helped her choose a doctor, and made certain she got to her appointment. Ladies First also provided Natalie with an audiotape of all the available educational materials on breast and cervical cancer. The program also provides educational materials in alternative formats, including brail and large type print. Ladies First recently purchased wheelchair-accessible examining tables for 10 hospitals throughout the state and for one correctional facility to help ensure that disabled women get thorough exams. Often, the typical exam table is too high and not wheelchair accessible.

Implications

Through practical steps like these, Ladies First works hard to make sure women like Natalie have access to vital health information and cancer screening services. Since its launch in 1995, the Vermont Department of Health has provided cancer screening and diagnostic services to 6,000 Vermont women through its Ladies First program, many of whom benefitted from special services for women with disabilities. As a result of Ladies First screening efforts, 70 cancers have been detected, most in the earliest, most treatable stage. This program demonstrates the importance of reaching uninsured and underinsured women and women who face physical challenges in a way that addresses their particular needs.

Contact Information